

# CHURCH UNITY AND PURITY

## Introduction

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- There is a tension in Scripture between the unity of believers and the purity of believers
- On the one hand, believers are called to unity – The unity of the church is its degree of freedom from divisions among true Christians (Grudem, 874)
- On the other hand, believers are called to purity – The purity of the church is its degree of freedom from wrong doctrine and conduct, and its degree of conformity to God’s revealed will for the church (Grudem, 873)
- What is the balance between these two? What happens if we default to one extreme or the other?

## The Call to Unity

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- Satan is incessantly trying to divide churches...it is one of his major objectives...to create friction between believers, which leads to factions, which leads to fracture
- He wants nothing more than for believers to “bite and devour one another” (Gal 5:15)
- Hence there is a call to unity amongst true believers

## Biblical Support

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**Psalm 133** ~ *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Coming down upon the beard, Even Aaron’s beard, Coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon Coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever.*

**Romans 12:16** ~ *Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.*

**Romans 15:5-6** ~ *Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*

**1 Corinthians 1:2** ~ *To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:*

**1 Corinthians 1:10** ~ *Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

**Philippians 1:27** ~ *Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;*

- “striving together” (*sunathleo*) = “to work together in a contest or competition”...it carries the idea of a team working together for a victory
- The idea is that of a football team trying to get the ball into the endzone
- Each player has different responsibilities, but they’re all striving for the same goal...they’re working as a team: Offensive linemen protect the quarterback....Running back rushes ball forward...Wide receivers get open for a pass
- That’s the way it ought to be in the church...playing as a team to advance the truth of God

**Philippians 2:2** ~ *make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*

**Philippians 4:2** ~ *I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.*

**Ephesians 4:3** ~ *being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

- “diligent” means “to hasten, to make haste, to be eager to do something, to be zealous, making every effort, to be diligent, to be serious, earnest”
- There is a sense of urgency, haste...almost a sense of crisis...Do it now!
- Spiritual unity is the responsibility of everyone all the time...It’s a job that never ends...it takes effort continually...Have to work at this constantly!
- Paul is saying: “You have unity through the Spirit, now guard it! Keep it! Maintain it! Work at it! Don’t give up on it!”
- The reason Paul commands the church to live in unity is because there already is an actual spiritual unity in Christ which exists among genuine believers (see vs. 4-6)

## **Unity Modeled in the Early Church**

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**Acts 1:14** ~ *These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

**Acts 2:46** ~ *And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,*

**Acts 4:24** ~ *And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them,*

**Acts 5:12** ~ *At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s portico.*

**Acts 15:25** ~ *it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,*

- Quite possibly, the explosive growth of the early church was due in no small part to the unity the early church demonstrated (see Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21; 16:5)

## **Basis for True Unity**

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- What is the basis for unity between believers and among local churches?

**John 17:17, 21-23** ~ *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth...that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.*

**Acts 2:42, 46** ~ *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,*

**Ephesians 4:11-13** ~ *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

- The bottom line is, without doctrinal understanding, there can be no stability or unity in the body
- Doctrinal teaching is essential for maturity and stability in the Body
- And a compromise in this area can lead to eventually forsaking the very Gospel for the sake of unity.
- Fellowship that ignores or glosses over the crucial doctrines of the faith is not Christian unity; it is ungodly compromise

- The truth of God’s Word is the criteria for true unity and fellowship to occur

*To teach that unity should be pursued at the cost of doctrine and truth “is false, reckless, and dangerous. Truth alone must determine our alignments. Truth comes before unity. Unity without truth is hazardous . . . Only those sanctified through the Word can be one in Christ. To teach otherwise is to betray the Gospel*

Charles Spurgeon

A.W. Tozer illustrated it this way: He said if you had four thousand pianos and tried to tune them to each other, you couldn't do it, but if you had one tuning fork you could tune them all to that

Tozer writes, “One hundred worshippers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become ‘unity’ conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship”

## The Call to Purity

### God Is Holy and Pure

- God is totally separate from sin; He is set apart and wholly other from His creation in His glory.
- He always acts in a righteous and pure manner because of His holy nature
- In His holiness, God is the moral and ethical standard. He alone sets the standard.
- God never violates His holiness

**Exodus 15:11** ~ *Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?*

**1 Samuel 2:2** ~ *There is no one holy like the Lord, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God.*

**Job 34:10** ~ *Far be it from God to do wickedness, and for the Almighty to do wrong.*

**Isaiah 6:3** ~ *And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”*

**Isaiah 57:15** ~ *For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.*

### God Expects Believers to be Pure

**Matthew 5:48** ~ *Be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.*

**1 Peter 1:16** ~ *You shall be holy, for I am holy*

**Romans 12:1** ~ *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

**2 Corinthians 7:1** ~ *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

- God calls the follower of Jesus Christ to a life of holiness
- The call to purity is the acknowledgement that God has called believers out of the world in order to maintain a personal and corporate purity in the midst of the world

### God Expects the Body of Christ to be Pure

**Ephesians 1:4** ~ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love*

**Ephesians 5:26-27** ~ *so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.*

**Titus 2:14** ~ *who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*

## **Protection of the Purity of the Bride of Christ is Urged**

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- Believers are to consistently work for the purity of the church
- We must remember that promoting the purity of the church is a process
- And it is a process that will never be perfected in this life....there are no perfect churches
- Discuss Grudem's "Signs of a More-Pure Church" on 874. How does MBC compare?

It is helpful at this point to remember that classical liberal Protestantism is humanistic, and its approaches are primarily man-centered rather than God-centered. When a church begins to stray from faithfulness to Christ, this will be evident not only in the shift to impure doctrine (which can sometimes be concealed from church members by the use of evasive language) but also in the daily life of the church: its activities, its preaching, its counseling, and even the casual conversations among members will tend to become more and more man-centered and less and less God-centered. There will tend to be a repeated emphasis on the typical kinds of self-help advice given in popular journals and by secular psychologists. There will be a horizontal orientation as opposed to a vertical or God-centered orientation, there will be fewer and fewer extended times of prayer and less and less emphasis on the direct application of Scripture to daily situations, but more emphasis on simply being a caring and sensitive person, and on affirming others and acting in love toward them. The conversation and activities of the church will have very little genuine spiritual content – little emphasis on the need for daily prayer for individual concerns and for forgiveness of sins, little emphasis on daily personal reading of Scripture, and little emphasis on moment-by-moment trust in Christ and knowing the reality of his presence in our lives. Where there are admonitions to moral reformation, these will often be viewed as human deficiencies that people can correct by their own discipline and effort, and perhaps encouragement from others, but these moral aspects of life will not primarily be viewed as sin against a holy God, sin which can only effectively be overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit working within. When such humanistic emphases become dominant in a church, it has moved far toward the "less-pure" end of the scale...and it is moving in the direction of becoming a false church.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 876.

### **Protection from False Doctrine**

**1 Timothy 6:3-4** ~ *If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,*

**1 Timothy 6:20** ~ *O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"—*

**2 Timothy 4:1-5** ~ *I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

**Titus 1:9** ~ *holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.*

### **Protection from False Teachers**

**Acts 20:27-31** ~ *For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise,*

*speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.*

**Romans 16:17** ~ *Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.*

**Philippians 3:1-3** ~ *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,*

**Titus 1:10-11** ~ *For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.*

**1 John 4:1-6** ~ *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

**2 John 9-11** ~ *Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.*

## **Protection from Sinning “Believers”**

**Matthew 18:15-17** ~ *If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

**1 Corinthians 5:1** ~ *It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife.*

**1 Timothy 5:19-20** ~ *Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.*

**2 Thessalonians 3:1-6** ~ *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.*

## **The Call to Balance**

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- Means that we must practice biblical separation with a humble, gracious spirit in such a way so as to strengthen the body of Christ

**1 Timothy 1:5** ~ *But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

**2 Timothy 2:22-25** ~ *Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,*

- We must avoid the extremes of mean spiritedness on the one hand and undiscerning tolerance on the other hand

## THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

By Gary Gilley

One of the most serious enemies facing the evangelical church today is the modern day ecumenical movement. The ecumenical movement -- the organized attempt to unify ALL churches regardless of doctrinal differences -- *is nothing new*. Churches and denominations with a low view of Scripture and a high tolerance for theological variances have long sought to unite the visible church. To these organizations truth is not as important as getting along and presenting a united front to the world -- even if this front is only a facade. Therefore, the drive toward ecumenicism has long been on the agenda of the liberal churches, and is the goal behind the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the National Council of Churches (NCC). It is taken for granted by fundamental believers that those churches that join the WCC or the NCC have apostatized from the faith. As a result, in obedience to Scripture the true follower of Christ separates himself from such churches, parachurches, and denominations (II Cor 6:14-18).

But there are new and dangerous winds blowing on the church today. It is no longer just the liberal, apostate church that is calling for unity at the expense of doctrine, now many so-called evangelicals are doing the same. This is not altogether unexpected since, in recent years, many evangelicals have developed the "live and let live" attitude toward those who teach heresy. But only recently have strong and trusted evangelicals called for the Christian community to ignore important doctrinal truths and unite with virtually anyone who claims to be a believer. To follow the leaders of this movement will ultimately cause many more church related organizations to apostasize, it will cripple our witness for Christ, and will further dampen true believers' interest in the truths found in the Word of God.

### THE ECUMENICAL CALL TO THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

The motivation behind ecumenicism among evangelicals originally was evangelism. Paul Crouch of Trinity Broadcast Network boldly states the case: "I don't care about your doctrines as long as you name the name of Jesus, as long as you believe He died and was buried but came out of the tomb on Sunday morning and ascended to the Father... I don't care about anything else! Let's join hands... to get this gospel preached in all the world... The rest of this stuff is what Paul the Apostle calls dung -- human excrement! It's not worth anything! Get rid of it... and get on with winning the lost...."

Crouch says rather bluntly what all of those who are involved in ecumenical evangelism (e.g. Billy Graham, Luis Palau, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth for Christ, etc.) have been saying for years. Doctrine (God's truth) is not important, only the spreading of the gospel is. Apparently, in the opinion of these leaders, the Epistles of the N.T. were wasted words. Scripture warns of false doctrine but the evangelical church acts as if this is no problem. See I Tim 1:3-4; 6:3-5; Titus 1:9; Col 2:8; Gal 1:6-8 and Acts 20:26-31. Yet they claim we don't need to understand anything more than John 3:16. It should also be noted that these individuals misrepresent the Great Commission (Matt 28:19,20). We are not called to evangelize, we are called to make disciples (followers) of Christ. This cannot be accomplished without doctrine -- the doctrine taught in the Epistles.

Charles Colson has perhaps become the most vocal evangelical calling for ecumenicism today. His recently published book, *The Body*, while mingled with many great truths, is basically a treatise on the greatness of the modern day Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Both by way of illustration and by actual statement, Colson argues that the RCC teaches the same truths as fundamental and evangelical churches. Therefore, we must break down the walls that separate us and unite as "Christians."

Nevermind that the RCC teaches 1) works salvation 2) that the RCC church traditions and the popes are given equal authority with Scripture 3) that the sacrifice of Christ was not sufficient for our salvation and is repeated at every mass 4) that Christ is not the only mediator between us and the Father -- rather we need Mary and the saints to go to bat for us, etc.

One of Colson's heroes is Mother Teresa, who has done much humanitarian good in India, but nevertheless teaches traditional Catholic doctrines. Colson says, "I can't tell you how many letters I've received over the years protesting my use of Mother Teresa as an example of holy living. Many even suggest that I visit her so I can give her the plan of salvation. To me this reaction is astounding. How could anyone deny this woman's faithful witness" (*The Body* p87)?

Colson seems to be totally confused. The issue is not whether someone is kind, or religious, or pious, but are they the child of God as a result of receiving the free gift of salvation by faith alone. Mother Teresa, as well as all *true* Roman Catholics, believe in works righteousness and thus cannot be saved.

Since the writing of *The Body*, Colson has led the evangelical community toward an ungodly unity with unbelievers through two major events. The first one was the acceptance on his part of the Templeton Prize. The purpose of the \$1 million prize is, "To encourage understanding of the benefits of each of the great religions." It was presented in 1993 as part of the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago. The panel that chose Colson included leading Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Jews. Rather than expose the heresies represented at the Parliament, Colson chose to receive their praise and money. Could anyone imagine Elijah accepting a prize from the priests of Baal, or Jesus from the Pharisees?

Even more blatant, for the Christian community, is the signing by leading evangelicals and Catholics the statement entitled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." The idea was born during discussions between Colson and Catholic priest Richard John Neuhaus of NYC, and was signed by prominent evangelicals such as Pat Robertson of CBN; Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ; Os Guinness; Mark Noll of Wheaton College, J.I. Packer and author John White. Several leading Catholics also signed the statement including William Ball, constitutional attorney. The Peoria Journal Star of April 2, 1994 stated: "They toiled together in the vineyards of the movements against abortion and pornography, and now leading Catholics and evangelicals are asking their flocks for a remarkable leap of faith: to finally accept each other as Christians.... They urged Catholics and evangelicals to increase their efforts against abortion and pornography and to lobby for value-laden education, but to no longer hold each other at theological arm's length and to stop aggressive proselytism of each other's flocks. 'As evangelicals and Catholics, we dare not by needless and loveless conflict between ourselves give aid and comfort to the enemies of the cause of Christ,' said the signers.... The statement also declares evangelicals and Catholics affirm the central beliefs in the resurrection and divinity of Christ. 'All who accept Christ as Lord and Saviour are brothers and sisters in Christ,' the declaration says....What has brought the two communities to this point, some of the signers said, are the experiences of worshipping together in the charismatic movement and working together in political causes such as the anti-abortion movement."

If this document is to be taken seriously we would have to admit that the Reformation was a mistake (something even *Christianity Today* is not ready to admit; May 16, 1994 p16). In addition, we would immediately remove our missionaries from Catholic countries, such as Spain and Brazil, because we are trying to evangelize those who are already saved. To continue such efforts among Catholics is no more than sheep stealing (according to the signers of the document).

### **THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD TO ECUMENICALISM**

What has brought the evangelical church to the place of such compromise? Why are we willing today to cave in on important doctrines that we would have died for a few decades ago? Although many things could be identified, let us suggest three steps that have led to where we are today:

- 1) Ecumenical Evangelism: For decades many believers have been willing to compromise essential doctrines for the sake of winning the lost to Christ. The motto has been, "Win the lost at any cost." Ultimately, of course, such concessions lead to a watering down of Biblical teachings in order to accommodate and avoid offending the various groups involved. The Fundamentalist Movement is distinguished from the Evangelical Movement in that the Fundamentalists have refused to unite with liberals and doctrinal deviates in order to evangelize.
- 2) Ecumenical Social Involvement: Political involvement and strong efforts to change society has not been a part of the evangelical or fundamental church until recently. One of the reasons that many conservative Christians broke from the mainline denominations in the 1930's was to move the church back to its primary task of preaching the gospel and discipling believers. And so, until recently the push to change the political landscape into conformity with Christian beliefs was unknown within the evangelical community. That has all changed. Today it would appear that Christians are more concerned with changing society than calling and preparing people for God's Kingdom. This is a marked change from just a few years ago. If our goal is to change society, then we must have numbers. Since there are not enough doctrinally-correct Christians to make much of a dent in the political world, it is then necessary to unite with others who share our values --whether or not they teach Biblical truth. Hence our dilemma. If we stand fast for doctrinal integrity we are unable to change society due to lack of numbers. If we compromise our beliefs by uniting with those who have similar values but poor theology, we have political clout at the expense of a compromised message.
- 3) A premium placed on experience rather than truth: In David Wells' book, *No Place for Truth*, he studies the evangelical community and forcefully demonstrates that, as a whole, Christians are no longer interested in, or motivated by, truth. Following the lead of our society, we cry for "life -- not doctrine." We have forgotten that it is TRUTH that sets us free (Jh 8:32). Life cannot be found apart from doctrine, yet what believers look for in a church today are programs, entertainment, great music and productions -- not sound Biblical teaching. Wells says, "Within the church, strong winds are blowing from a range of religious consumers who look to the churches and ministers to meet their needs -- and who quickly look elsewhere if they feel those needs are not being met. Basically, these consumers are looking for the sort of thing the self movement is offering; they just want it in evangelical dress. A genuinely biblical and God-centered ministry is almost certain to collide head-on with the self-absorption and anthropocentric focus that are now normative in so many evangelical churches " (p256).

Since truth is no longer the dominate force behind the evangelical church something has had to take its place. That something is experience and pragmatism. People are interested in feeling good, and in "what works." If they have to compromise their beliefs in order to have a good experience, or in order to accomplish some desirable goal, then so be it. The end result -- a church that stands for nothing and falls for anything.

### **COMPROMISES NECESSARY FOR MODERN DAY ECUMENICALISM**

Many evangelicals who are pushing for ecumenical unity say that those who resist unity are making a big deal out of nothing. They assure us that while there may be a need for concession in minor areas of doctrine, compromise on the essentials is not necessary. As a matter of fact Colson says, "Everyone who believes in the orthodox truths about Jesus Christ -- in short, every Christian -- is a fundamentalist" (*The Body* p186). Colson based this statement on a book published in the early part of this century called, *The Fundamentals*. This book was a collection of writings by some of the finest pastors, theologians and Christian leaders of the day. It was written to define the nonnegotiables of the faith -- those things to which all true believers must adhere. The nonnegotiables that Colson mentions are: the infallibility of Scripture; the deity of Christ; the Virgin Birth and miracles of Christ; Christ's substitutionary death; and Christ's physical resurrection and eventual return. However, he fails to mention several other fundamentals that are just as essential to the faith but are denied by the RCC. As a matter of fact, chapter 49 of *The Fundamentals*, is entitled, "Is Romanism Christianity?" The chapter goes on to prove that the RCC is not true to the faith; in fact, that it preaches "another gospel" (Gal 1:6-9). This view is based on several false teachings of the RCC including those mentioned on page 16 of this study.

Can the true followers of Christ close their eyes to such heresies?

Are doctrines such as salvation by faith alone, a negotiable? Are we to pretend that those who teach that we must work our way to heaven are truly born again? Are we to work side-by-side with those who teach another gospel, especially in light of the fact that Paul pronounced a curse on those who did in his day (Gal 1:8,9)?

It is interesting to note that at the very time evangelical Christians are being called upon to be more tolerant toward Catholics, the Catholics are becoming more vocal against Fundamentalists. An article found in the Peoria Journal Star during the month of March, 1994 reports the following: "A new Vatican document on how to interpret the Bible condemns the fundamentalist approach as distorting, dangerous and possibly leading to racism.... 'Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide, said the document, written by the Pontifical Biblical Commission... The commission's authors saved their harshest language for Christian fundamentalist denominations, which have been posing a growing challenge to the church, particularly in Latin America.... 'The fundamentalish approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life.'"

## A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR ECUMENICALISM

How should the child of God, seeking to honor the Lord through obedience to His Word, respond to the ecumenical movement? Rather than tolerance and compromise with those who teach false doctrines, the Word instructs us to take four actions:

**REFUTE:** Titus 1:9 says that the elders of the church must be able, not only to exhort in sound doctrine, but to refute those who do not teach sound doctrine. Far from ignoring doctrinal error, we are to oppose it. All faulty doctrine leads to faulty living. Faulty living, in turn, ultimately disgraces God. Therefore, it is important that we know and live Biblical truth.

**EXPOSE:** Eph 5:11 is speaking in the context of living out our theology. Vv9,10 says, "For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth, trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." So we are to know the truth of God's word, and live it, if we desire to please Him. Then in 5:11 Paul says, "And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them." We expose both false doctrine and false living by bringing it into the light of God's Word (v13). We are called to examine the teachings of those around us in the light of Scripture. That which is sound doctrine should be embraced. That which is not in agreement with the Bible is not only to be rejected, but to be exposed in order that others are not deceived by it.

**REMOVE:** The local church is given the authority and the mandate to remove from the fellowship those who will not turn from heresy (I Tim 1:20; II Tim 2:18; Titus 3:10). It is disobedience to this principle that has led the church astray doctrinally.

**SEPARATE:** The N.T. is abundantly clear that when apostates cannot be removed from the fellowship, that the believer must then remove himself from their presence (II Cor 6:14-18; Rom 16:17; Acts 19:8,9). To fellowship with (or support in any way), those who teach major doctrinal error is to participate in their evil deeds (II John 10,11). Rather than minimize the importance of the truths found in God's Word, believers are called to become grounded in sound doctrine in order that they might mature in the faith (II Tim 3:13-4:2; I Tim 4:1-6; Eph 4:11-16).



## When Should I Leave My Church?

[www.challies.com/christian-living/when-should-i-leave-my-church](http://www.challies.com/christian-living/when-should-i-leave-my-church)

Occasionally I attempt to think back to all of the questions I receive from readers of this site. I try to think of things I have been asked many times but have never written about. One that came to mind recently is rather a simple question: Under what circumstances may I leave my church? Quite often I receive emails from readers who are concerned that their church no longer preaches sound doctrine or perhaps no longer offers skillful teaching. And they want to know if the Bible allows them or even compels them to move on.

We live in an age of consumerism and this leaves us accustomed to prioritizing our needs and, even more so, our desires, above all else. We march out of stores that do not carry the products we want at the prices we demand; we customize our lives, from the clothes we wear to the cell phones we carry. In all things we are sovereign, we are discerning consumers who demand that things be done our way.

But church is an area where consumerism ought to be the furthest thing from our minds. At church we are part of an [involuntary community](#) which is pieced together by God. We are placed under spiritual authorities and are to be subject to them. We need to be very careful, then, to examine our hearts and examine our motives before withdrawing membership from a church. Sadly, though, there are certain situations in which this becomes a necessity.

There are good reasons to leave a church and there are bad reasons to leave a church. I dare say that there are far more bad reasons than good reasons. There are times where you *must* leave and times when you *may* leave. In this brief article I want to point to a few of those good reasons. Perhaps another time I can focus more on the really bad ones.

### You *Must* Leave

Most of the reasons you *must* leave relate to leadership. If the leaders of a church show contempt and disregard for the Bible and for sound doctrine, you are called to separate yourself from them. And it may well be that the only way to do this is to leave your church (though in some circumstances you may be able to have the leaders removed).

Here are four situations in which the Bible tells you that you must leave a church.

*If the teaching is heretical* (Galatians 1:7-9). If the leaders of a church are teaching what is outright heresy, you must separate yourself from that church. Staying to fight the battle is likely to make less of a statement than separating yourself from the church and its leaders, declaring them the heretics they are. The Bible declares that they are accursed, that they are anathema. Of course before you do this, be sure that what they are teaching truly is heresy and not merely something you disagree with.

*If the leaders tolerate error from those who teach* (Romans 16:17). We are called to separate ourselves from leaders who tolerate unbiblical alternatives to the doctrines that are most fundamental to the faith. These people, in allowing such teaching to stand, cause division. God demands that you remove yourself from such a church.

*If there is utter disregard for biblical church discipline* (1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14). If a church refuses to call its people to the Bible's standard of holy living and if it refuses to exercise church discipline, you must remove yourself from that church. A church that tolerates blatant sin is no true church at all. My wife and I once had to leave a church for this very reason—the church refused to discipline a man and woman who were living together as husband and wife even though they were not married.

*If the church is marked by utter hypocrisy (2 Timothy 3:5).* This passage refers to a particular kind of hypocrisy in which the church has the appearance of being marked by godliness and yet denies that the Holy Spirit is the true source of this godliness. It is happy to look like it is Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered and yet it is actually a mockery of God in that the leaders deny his power and presence.

Reformed churches have typically spoken of three marks of a true church: the faithful preaching of the Word of God, the proper administration of the sacraments and church discipline. We can find each of these represented above. If these marks are missing, if there is gross hypocrisy or heresy, if there is no demand for holiness among the leaders or membership, if there is error being tolerated by those who preach, the Bible tells you to separate yourself from that church.

## **You *May* Leave**

There are also reasons for which we may choose to leave. Though they are not the kinds of reasons that will force you to leave a church, they may well still be reasons that are good and wise. In all cases, a decision will require great care and much prayer.

*If you desire better teaching.* The Bible does not forbid you from leaving one church to go to another one that offers better teaching. In general this should be done not merely because a particular pastor is a better teacher but because another church has a more sound understanding of what comprises good teaching.

*If you desire to use your gifts.* If you have sought to use your God-given gifts and talents within your current church and have found no place to use them, you may wish to find a church where those gifts will be useful and where they will be appreciated.

*If you desire a more convenient location.* A decision may simply come down to convenience, where attending one church may save you a lot of time or allow you to serve in a local community instead of a distant one.

*If it better serves your family.* It may be that your children are the only ones within a church. Moving to another church may give open up many opportunities for them to grow in the faith or to serve within the church.

And we could go on all day. There are few reasons for which you must leave a church and many for which you may. As a general rule of thumb, be very slow to withdraw your membership and leave a church only with the greatest of care and the utmost humility.

(Some of the first section was drawn from a [Q&A session](#) with John MacArthur)